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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3554
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6132
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5265
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0439
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 1064
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN PRIORITY 0094
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 1762
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 9968
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY 1363
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0486
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1051
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0390
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1835
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR PRIORITY 0826
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 3327
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 0864
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO PRIORITY 0661
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 0350
RUEHMI/USOFFICE FRC FT LAUDERDALE PRIORITY 2889
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0552

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000688

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HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER
FRC FT LAUDERDALE FOR CLAMBERT
COPENHAGEN FOR DLAWTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: VENEZUELA'S NEW CARDINAL: CAUTIOUSLY
FORWARD-LEANING

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR 1.4 (D)

Summary

11. (C) On March 10, the Ambassador met with Archbishop (and Cardinal-designate) Jorge Urosa and the Papal Nuncio Giacinto Berlocco at the Nunciature in Caracas to discuss the current situation in Venezuela, as well as ways the Embassy and the Church might cooperate in the future. The Ambassador expressed his concern that Chavez was dismantling democratic institutions and that the Church could soon be the only independent institution left. He offered support (directly or indirectly) for the Church's programs. They discussed ways to engage the US and other regional churches in Venezuela and the possibility of a papal visit in 2007. The Nuncio showed new enthusiasm for an activist approach in Venezuela; the soon-to-be Cardinal was more cautious. Nonetheless, the Church seems to be moving in the right direction. End Summary.

Ambassador Meets with New Cardinal

12. (C) On March 10, the Ambassador met with Archbishop (and Cardinal-designate) Jorge Urosa and the Papal Nuncio Giacinto Berlocco at the Nunciature in Caracas to discuss the current situation in Venezuela, as well as ways the Embassy and the

Church might cooperate in the future. The Ambassador began the discussion by mentioning that the Church would set up an advisory commission for the December 2006 presidential elections. Urosa said the plan was an attempt to bridge the divide between the BRV, which wants no church involvement in overseeing the elections, and the opposition, which wants the Church to virtually run the elections.

Support of the Church

13. (C) The Ambassador suggested that President Chavez was systematically, and successfully, dismantling democratic institutions, and that, at some point, the Church could be the last remaining institution capable of challenging the BRV or even offering an alternative message to the BRV's rhetoric. Urosa nodded affirmatively. For this reason, the Ambassador continued, we felt it was important to support the Church's social, education, and health programs, which, he said could be done directly or indirectly, through USAID, NGOs, or the private sector. He clarified that this help need not be high profile, but would be available upon request from the Church.

14. (C) Urosa stated that this sort of assistance would be helpful, but stressed that he was trying very hard to avoid a direct confrontation with Chavez. He believed that his predecessor, Ignacio Velasco, had been much too political. Urosa's political sensitivity was apparent; he stressed that the he and the Ambassador should meet on neutral ground to avoid the perception of a political alliance by both the BRV

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and the opposition. The Ambassador said that the important thing was to establish a working relationship, and that he would be willing to meet Urosa whenever and wherever he wished.

Engage the U.S. Church

15. (C) Urosa brought up the possibility of engaging the U.S. church in the Venezuelan issue. The Ambassador agreed that this would be productive, and said that he had already spoken with a U.S. Archbishop in an effort to encourage more support for the Venezuelan Church. The Ambassador relayed that the U.S. Archbishop was willing to be supportive, perhaps through Catholic Relief Services, or by making a special appeal for Venezuela. The U.S. Archbishop felt he needed a counterpart in Venezuela. The Ambassador told Urosa that he hoped to facilitate this contact. Urosa suggested that if the Archbishop were to attend his investiture as Cardinal in the Vatican, the two could meet then. Otherwise, the Nuncio offered to engage the Latin American representative in the U.S. Episcopal Conference and try to open a dialogue that way.

Engage Vatican

16. (C) The Ambassador stated that he also hoped to engage the Vatican more on the issue of Venezuela, noting that he understood their desire not to have a direct confrontation with Chavez. However, he hoped the Vatican would nudge other national churches in the region as well as provide visible, symbolic support for Church programs in Venezuela. He hoped that the U.S. Church could process some of its support through the Vatican. The two seemed to believe this was possible, but Urosa wanted to make direct contact with his American counterparts first.

17. (C) The Ambassador broached the possibility that at some point in the near future, the Pope and President Bush would

speak, and suggested it was possible that the President would suggest a papal visit to Venezuela. The Ambassador asked the two their opinion of such a visit. The Nuncio pointed out that the Pope was scheduled to travel to Brazil for the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) in July 2007, and thought it would be a good idea if he were to come through Venezuela on the way. He clarified, however, that this could only be done if both the Episcopal Conference and the BRV were to extend an invitation. Urosa agreed that it would be a good idea and that the timing would be right then, too. Urosa said that he would address it with the other bishops, but warned that it would be tricky to elicit an invitation from Chavez and the BRV. The Ambassador stressed that they would never know what Chavez would do until they asked.

Comment

18. (C) This was the first time the Ambassador has seen the Nuncio show enthusiasm for a more activist approach in

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Venezuela. On the other hand, however, it was clear Urosa will be cautious. While the steps are small, the relationship is moving in the right direction. The Ambassador will try to meet with the Archbishop of Maracaibo, the new president of Venezuela's Episcopal Conference, as soon as possible to further this relationship.
BROWNFIELD